1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

G. Present Holdings and Problems of Amhara Peasants of Begemdir Province.

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423 Most of the Amhara peasants of Begemdir (and other provinces) live much as their ancestors have lived for centuries. They subsist largely on the products of their lands, needing relatively few gooda and services from outside the province. They do not care for profit and loss accounting. Their social organization is built on visible human relationships. They do not welcome modern bookkeeping and registration, particularly with regard to land tenure, which the modern central government is gradually attempting to foist on them; adding, to the proud provincial Amhara mind, insult to disturbance by doing it through "Galla" clerks from Shoa province.

423 The basic land unit to which the Amhara peasant of Begemdir refers in transactions, is the "qada", usually a little less than half an acre. The average "gasha" may contain as many as 150 "qada", varying with the relative fertility of the soil. Several patriiocal hamlets, constituting a "mandar" (villageship) and supervised by one cheqa shum (headman), may control as many as 10 gashas, (about 500 acres.). The average farmer, supporting his family of procreation and an aged parent and aunt, may control, on the average, about 50 qada (about 20 acres), half of which he may leave fallow at any given time.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5 •
Ethiopia MP1
Tigre MN9

I

INTRODUCTION

AMHARA TRADITION AND ETHIOPIA'S MODERNIZATION

THE FACT OF AMHARA DOMINANCE

Of the many traditions which are alive in the empire of Ethiopia—those of the nomadic Danakil and the sedentary Wollamo, the hippopotamus-eating Woyto and the ensete-eating Gurage, the age-graded Konso and the patrilineal Somali, the Judaic Falasha and the Muslim Bani 'Amer, and many others—clearly the dominant tradition is that of the people known throughout history to the outside world as the Abyssinians. Living on the temperate highland massif in the northern and central regions of the country, these people have gained their subsistence through the plow cultivation of cereal grains, have organized their polity as a feudal kingdom, and have remained steadfast in their Monophysite Christian faith since its introduction to the land in the fourth century.

The Abyssinians comprise two linguistic and geographical groups—the Amhara and the Tigre.* The Tigre inhabit the northern part of Ethiopia, above the Takazzē River; their lands fall in what are now the province of Tigre and the former Italian colony of Eritrea. Their language, Tigrinya, is

* Abyssinians object to the term "Abyssinian," since it has been used pejoratively by foreigners, even though they do use its indigenous counterpart, *"Hăbashā,"* among themselves. The term apparently derives from the name of one of the South Arabian tribes which migrated to Ethiopia in antiquity—the Habashat. In deference to this objection, I shall use the compound "Amhara-Tigre" in place of "Abyssinian" wherever feasible. The name "Ethiopia" will be used consistently to refer to the national polity which, throughout its history, has included other peoples and traditions as well as the Amhara-Tigre.

1. [The Abyssinians, composed of Amhara and Tigre--Analyst]

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Identification

The Amhara are a Semitic-speaking people of highland Ethiopia, with somewhere between 3 and 5 million people. Kuo estimates the population of Ethiopia at 15, 000, 000 plus 1, 100, 000 (1950) in Eritrea living on 457, 000 sq. mi. (including Eritrea). Rey (1923) regards 9 to 10 million for Ethiopia alone as a reasonable estimate. DeCastro divides the population of Ethiopia as follows: 33% Semites, 42% Galla, 10% Western Cushites, 8% Somali and Afar, and 7% Negroids. Kuo estimates the Amhara alone at 2, 000, 000. In religion the Amhara belong to the Coptic Christian church. They are of medium height, bronze in skin color, with black hair. Ethiopia was known to the ancient Egyptians as Punt. It became an Egyptian province, at least in part, under the 18th dynasty, but became independent by 1000 B.C. In the late centuries B.C. immigrants from Arabia flowed into the country, largely displacing the Agau or Central Cushitic inhabitants. The main Semitic immigration came around the 7th century B.C. from Yemen, where a high agricultural civilization prevailed from 750 to 542 B.C. The Sabaean language became Geez in Ethiopia, later being differentiated into Tigre, Tigrinya, Amharic, Harari, and Gurage. The Gurage were an offshoot of the colonists of Harar, who were distinct from the group entering north Ethiopia. Archeology shows a Semitic civilization in the plateau of Eritrea and N Tigre from the 7th century B.C. on. Axum (in Tigrinya country) became the capital. The kingdom of Axum expanded from the 1st to 3rd century A.D. Yemen was conquered and ruled twice, first c. 300-378 A.D., second c. 524-590. Axum adopted Christianity before 400, but its great spread was much later (13th and 14th centuries). Axum disappears after c. 700. The rise of Islam now shut Ethiopia off from the Mediterranean world, with which it had long been in close contact. A new kingdom of Najashi appears by 872 in N. Abyssinia, its subjects being mixed Semites and Agau. In 1137 an Agau dynasty came to power at Roha, controlling Tigre and adjacent Lastra and Angot. East Shoa was converted to Islam in 1108, and Moslem expansion had begun to convert the Saho, Afar, and Somali by 1300 and the Ittu, Gurage, Tulama and Hadya (N Kambata) countries shortly thereafter. The Solomonid dynasty arose in 1270, and soon converted to Christianity the pagans of W Shoa and Damot. It reached its apex in 1468, immediately declining. In the early 16th century Moslem Somali overran the country, but were

defeated with Portuguese aid in 1543. After 1700, the rule shifted from Tigre to Amhara, where Gondar became the capital until replaced by Addis Ababa in 1892. King Theodore conquered Gojam, Tigre, and Shoa, establishing a unified kingdom in 1855. After a period of decline and conflict with the English, Menelik II, king of Shoa, again established a unified state in 1889. The Italians were defeated in the war of 1895-96, but conquered Ethiopia in 1934. Liberation came in 1941.

Basic Economy

Primarily agricultural, with use of ox-drawn plow and occasional irrigation. The staple crop is teff (Eragrostis abyssinica), followed by barley and durra (a grain sorghum). Other grains include eleusine (E. coracana), wheat, emmer, oats (rare), maize (not common), pearl millet (rare and only in lowlands), and rye (a little). Legumes include peas (Cicer arietinum), lentils, and "beans" (including Faba sp., Phaseolus sp., and possibly Dolichos sp.). Root crops include ensete (Ensete edulis, formerly Musa ensete), peanuts, and onions. Oil plants include flax, castor-oil plant (Ricinus sp.), nug (Guizotia oleifera), sesame (rare), "suf", and rape (perhaps recent). Condiment crops include coffee (the leading cash crop), sugarcane (rather recent), peppers (Capsicum sp.), and tobacco; Hildebrandt also mentions mustard, safflower, and purslane. Other crops include cotton, kat (Catha edulis), gourds, and grapes (formerly grown but practically extinct on account of disease).

Animal husbandry is of great though subsidiary importance. Domestic animals include cattle (mainly but not exclusively of zebu type), sheep (mainly fat-tailed hairy variety), goats, horses, donkeys, mules (greatly prized), dogs, cats, chickens (eggs not eaten), and bees, but no pigs. Cows, goats, and sheep are milked, and butter is made (as a cosmetic). Fishing is unimportant. Hunting (for large game) is a sport or a pursuit of professional hunters. A very little gathering is done. Trade is important, and there are markets.

Sex Division of Labor

Men hunt, fish, tend bees, and do most of the agricultural work. Women do the milking.

Property

Most land is owned by the Coptic church and by large landowners,

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members of the feudal nobility. There are few small independent farmers, most peasants being tenants with hereditary use rights, paying a fixed annual or semi-annual rent in money, produce, or services. There are also sharecroppers.

Inheritance is patrilineal. Land is divided equally among all sons, but movables are inherited by ElSo. Women do not share in inheritance.

Social Stratification

There is a complex social stratification into royalty, landed feudal aristocracy, a small middle class, tenant farmers, outcaste groups (e.g., hunters), and hereditary slaves (war captives in origin).

Marriage

Marriages are arranged by parents. The sources mention gifts but not any form of true consideration.

Monogamy is officially absolute, but concubinage is not uncommon. Levirate permitted.

Family

Independent nuclear families, each occupying a compound, are the norm.

Residence

A married couple reside for a month or two in the house of HuFa, then move to a house of their own nearby. Neolocal residence is common in Addis Ababa and occasional elsewhere. Matrilocal residence is unheard of.

Kin Groups and Exogamy

There is a marked tendency toward local exogamy with respect to the village or hamlet.

Marriage is forbidden with any fourth cousin or closer kinsmen (formerly with anyone having a common ancestor within 7 generations). Kindreds are apparently present and functional.

Descent is apparently bilateral, though patri-lineages are possible, genealogies being kept for many generations in the male line. A son takes his father's first name as his own surname, but patronymy is absent.

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Kinship Terminology

Fa--abbat. Mo--innat. So--wundlij. Da--setlij. Hu--bali. Wi--misti. ElBr--gashe wundime. YoBr--wundime. Si(m.s.)--ihite. ElSi (w.s.)--talakihite. YoSi (w.s.)--tanashihite.

Avuncular terms are lineal, nepotic terms bifurcate collateral (see special kinship chart).

FaBrCh, MoBrCh--agotlij. MoSiCh, FaSiCh--akistlij.

Settlement Pattern

The Amhara live in compact hamlets, villages, or towns, usually with 50-80 inhabitants. Addis Ababa (c. 150, 000) is the only town larger than 10, 000. Wealthy people live in round one-story houses with walls of stone plastered with mud and thatched roofs, but poor people live in round huts with cylindrical walls of wattle and daub and conical straw-thatched roofs. A house and yard are normally enclosed by a wall of mud or stone.

Community Organization

Being normally exogamous, a village is perhaps a patri-deme. Both circumcision and clitoridectomy are practiced, and in some places also infibulation.

Local Government

There are village "mayors" (shum) and councils of elders.

State

The Amhara are ruled by a king, who is also emperor (negus) of the Ethiopian state. His power is theoretically absolute. He rules through feudal lords (ras), who are provincial governors, and an administrative hierarchy filled mainly by nobles. He is advised by a council of ministers, and derives his revenues from customs, dues, taxation (normally 10% of production), labor levies (one day in four for a man's overlord), and levies of food for troops. Succession is patrilineal.

Warfare

The Amhara have fought wars for territorial aggrandizement.

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